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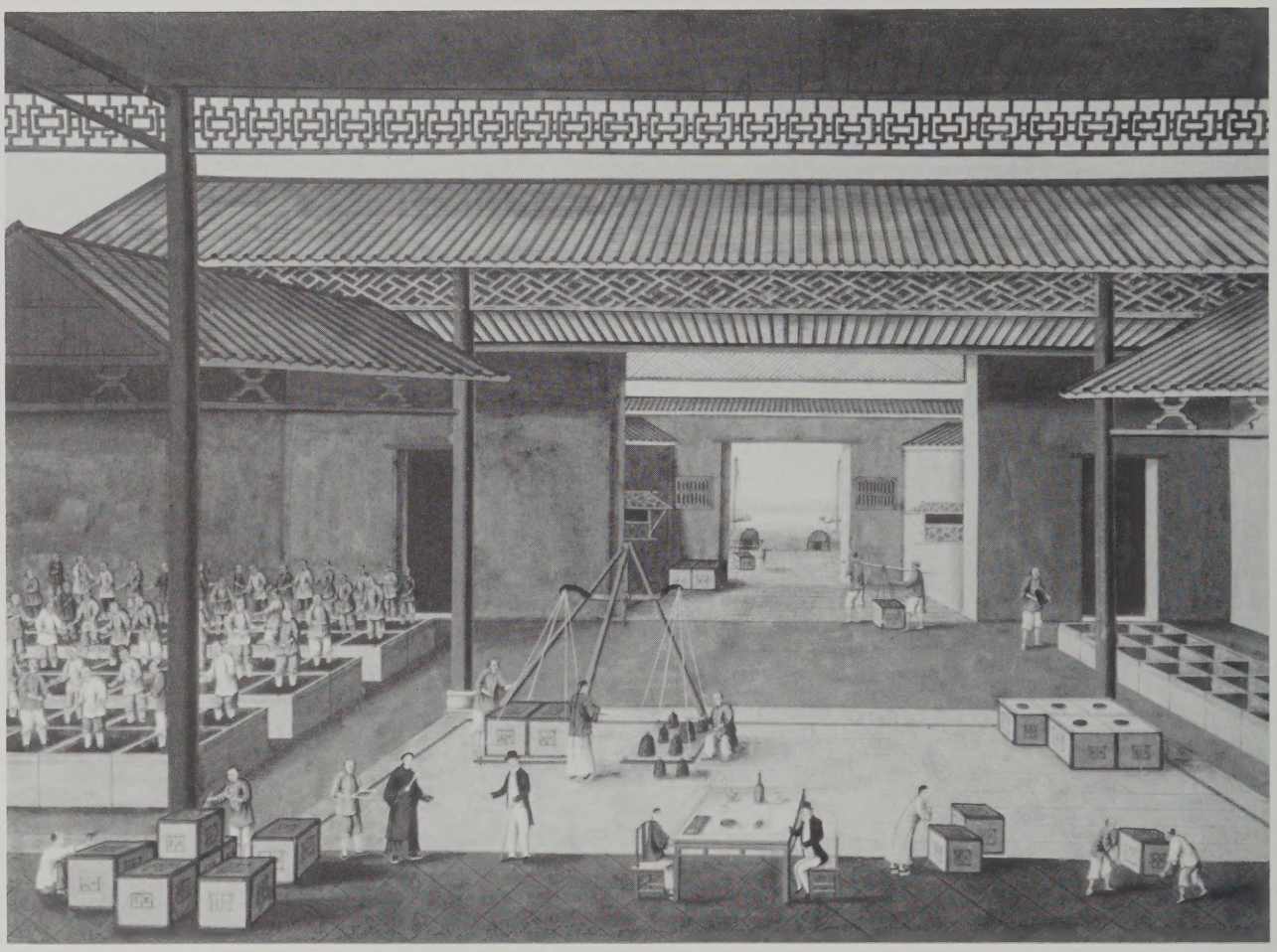


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FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to attend my first Annual Antiques Show. Since my arrival at the Peabody Essex Museum, I have been enormously impressed by the dedication of the staff and volunteers whose tireless efforts make events such as this happen. It is my distinct privilege to thank the many people whose hard work, enthusiasm and spirit make the Annual Antiques Show such a success. I am also delighted to thank the individuals, businesses and corporations that contribute so generously to the Show. As the Peabody Essex Museum prepares to embark upon its third century, we can be proud of the accomplishments of the Annual Antiques Show.

Dan L. Monroe
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Curwen Collection, Peabody Essex Museum

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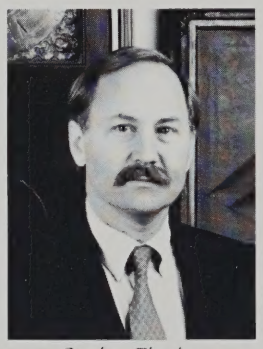
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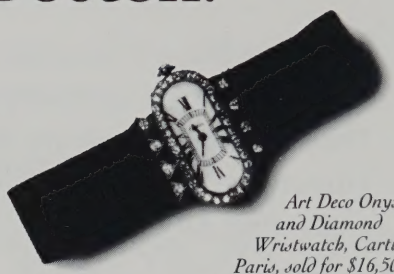
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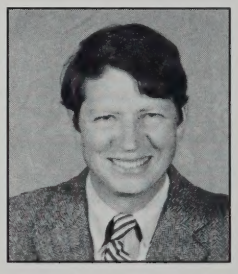
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Hazel Oliver is a good friend. In fact, she established the Friends of the former Essex Institute in 1985, and is an active member of the Friends Council of the Peabody Essex Museum. She is also an active member of the Ladies Committee of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and has a twenty-year commitment to the Marblehead Historical Society, and, well, you get the picture, Hazel Oliver knows just about everyone.

Hazel Oliver has made an art of being a museum volunteer over the years. From her twenty years guiding house tours of the museum's Crowninshield-Bentley House, three years as president of the Marblehead Historical Society and many more years as a member, to her involvement with the MFA's Ladies Committee, she has brought an extra measure of energy, enthusiasm and friendliness to dozens of projects, large and small. One of her major volunteer accomplishments was as chairman of a Marblehead Historical Society project that restored a 200 year-old hand painted English wall covering in the Lee Mansion. This year she gladly agreed to serve as Honorary Chairman for the museum's 21st Annual Antiques Show.

"This is a wonderful event" she said recently. "The quality is always high and the show offers a great opportunity for many people to acquire something special in a very pleasant atmosphere."

Hazel's volunteer career began over thirty years ago when Dean Fales, then Director of the Essex Institute, invited her to join a course for volunteer guides. At that time, with a young family at home, it was no small task to plunge into the world of museums and American antiques. But, she quickly adds, her husband was always very supportive of her strong interest in museum work. "Emerson was my own Michelangelo," she says of her late husband," he was a real Renaissance man."

Hazel Oliver moved to Marblehead with her husband in 1944. After so many years and so many projects, she sums up her feelings for the area in a few well chosen words. "Essex County is the most beautiful county I know. It has everything – woods, coastlines, historic towns and buildings. For me this Antiques Show is a way to honor our rich heritage."

With her eye on the future and a strong sense of the past, Hazel Oliver has been more than a friend. She has become a model of volunteerism for many dedicated volunteers of the Peabody Essex Museum. "I get paid back in spades." she says with a smile. "I'm particularly fond of this museum and of the many friends I have made over the years I have been associated here. I feel I have been very fortunate to have known the joys and fun of being a museum volunteer and I am looking forward to the challenge of the future."

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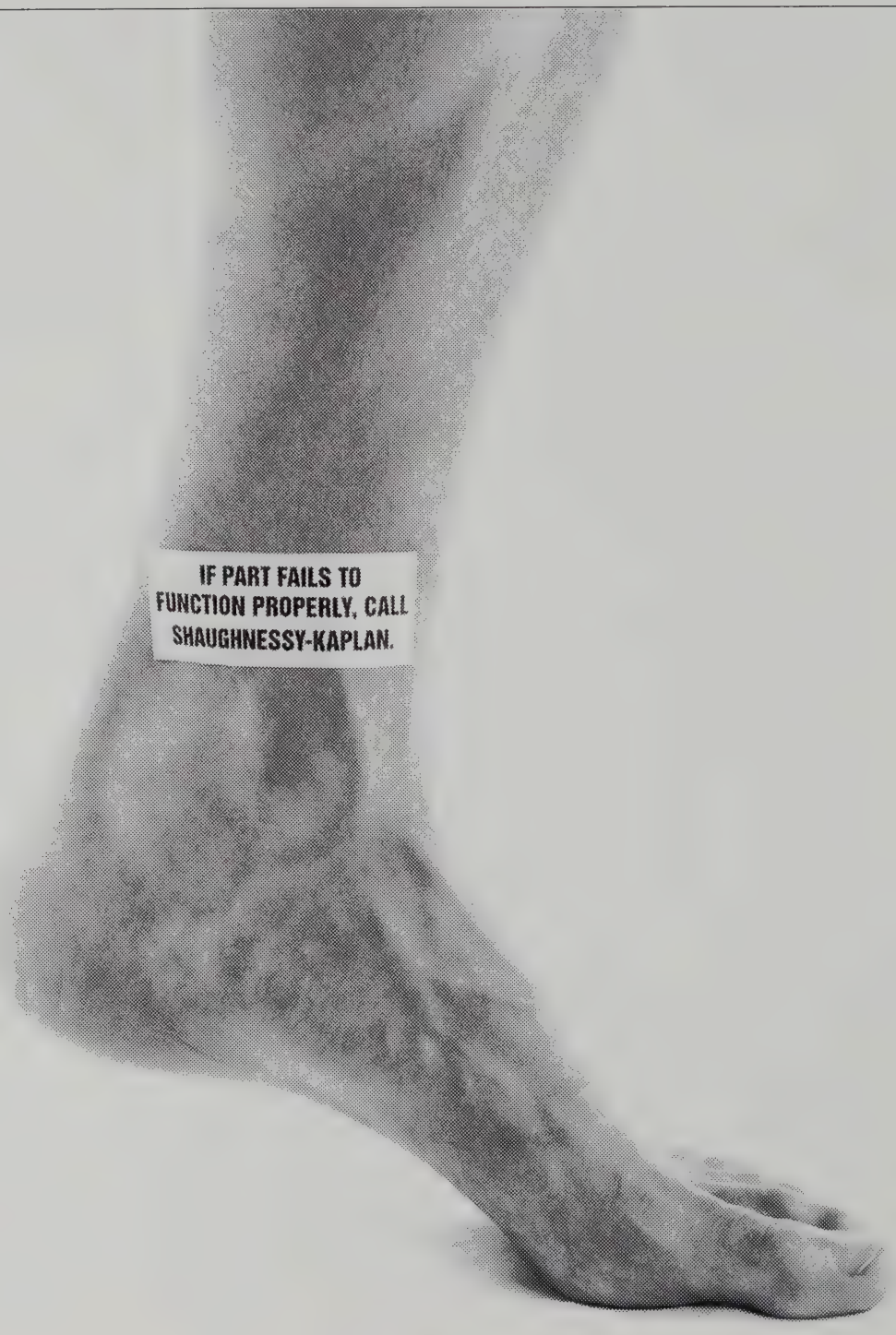
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Collecting American Decorative Arts a Century ago...

THE CURWEN COLLECTION

by Dean Lahikainen
Curator of American Decorative Arts, Peabody Essex Museum

The collection of American decorative and fine arts objects given to the Peabody Essex Museum in 1900 by George Rea Curwen of Salem was the earliest and most important bequest of its kind ever given to the museum. Consisting of furniture, glass, ceramics, silver, textiles, jewelry, and portraits, the collection is unmatched both for its quality and for the rarity of many of the items it contains.

Curwen (fig.1) was among a handful of pioneer New England collectors who started to assemble a private decorative arts collection prior to the Civil War when there were few authoritative sources or established rules to guide their efforts. (1) While Curwen relied on advice from a close circle of friends who shared his interests, it was his own keen eye and instincts that ultimately shaped the collection into a superlative chronicle of Salem's early material culture. His activities form an interesting chapter in the history of this popular American pastime.



Figure 1. George Rea Curwen (1823-1900) from an 1863 photograph. All illustrations are from the collections of the Peabody Essex Museum.



Figure 2. Curwen's parlor at 25 Lynde Street, Salem, from Newton Elwell's Colonial Furniture and Interiors (1896).

Born in 1823 into one of Salem's oldest families, Curwen's interest in the decorative arts can be documented as early as 1849, the year he was elected a member of the newly-formed Essex Institute. He became an active donor of ceramics (2) and for the next half century shared the interests of a small group within the organization who embraced genealogical research and antique collecting as their principal recreational activities. For Curwen, the tangible remains of an ancestor's earthly existence added texture and color to the written record. Curwen counted among his own ancestors Jonathan Corwin, presiding judge at the 1692 Salem witch trials, the Hon. Samuel Curwen, affluent judge of the Admiralty Court whose political sympathies forced him to flee Salem to England in 1776, (3) and the flamboyant sea captain James Barr.

Curwen's own life was markedly less dramatic than those of his infamous forebears. A lifelong bachelor, he worked as a copyist at the local Registry of Deeds for over 40 years and devoted most of his free time and limited income to quiet antiquarian pursuits that drew little attention. It was the nation's centennial birthday that crystallized the growing interest in the arts and crafts of early America, creating a national movement that made Salem a tourist mecca and Curwen and

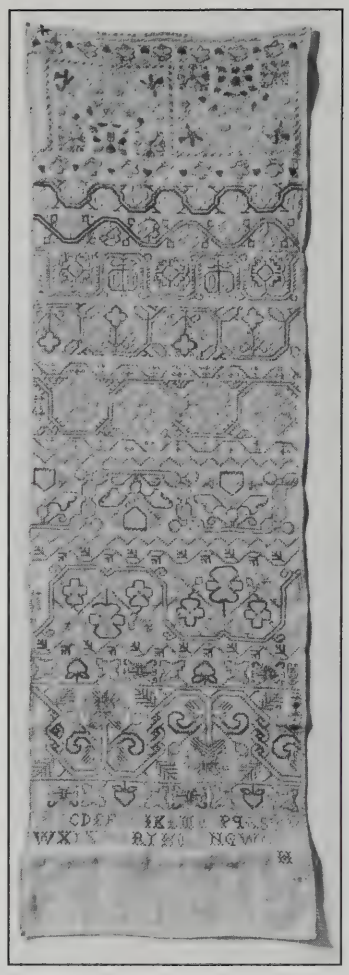


Figure 3. Sampler made by Mary Hollingsworth of Salem about 1660.Curwen Collection.

other early local collectors celebrated authorities. Curwen was an active participant in helping to organize the Essex Institute's first display of decorative arts in 1875 to mark the centennial, loaning articles from his already extensive collection. (4) As interest in antiques grew within the next two decades, Curwen and his closest friend, Henry Fitzgilbert Waters, dispensed advice and assisted a whole new generation of scholars who took a more academic approach to the field. Dr. Irving Lyon, the Hartford Connecticut physician and furniture collector, who wrote the first book on New England colonial furniture in 1891, was among the first to respond. He received a great deal of help from Curwen, and his failure to acknowledge it in his book angered Curwen. "I met Dr. Lyon at the Institute the other day," Curwen wrote to Waters a year after the publication appeared, "He apologized for not having called to see me. I was not very gracious [.] after all the assistance that he rec'd from you and I not to make any acknowledgement in his book or send us a copy I thought it was outrageous." (5) Curwen was happier with the efforts of Newton Elwell who published a view of Curwen's collection in his *Colonial Furniture and Interiors* (1896) (fig.2) and the drawings of several pieces from his collection in Alvan Crocker Nye's *Scaled Drawings of American Colonial Furniture* (1895). Curwen also generously shared his collection with the general public by sending portraits to the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. (6)

While Curwen neither wrote about the decorative arts nor published his own thoughts on collecting, a series of letters written by Curwen to Waters, while the latter was in England doing research for the New England Historic and Genealogical Society, offers much insight into the early days of collecting. Remarkably, the letters suggest that most of Curwen's acquisitions were made within a half mile radius of his home at 25 Lynde Street in Salem. Inheritance played a large part in forming the collection, but acquisitions also came from friends, neighbors, and relatives. His family connections gave him access to many of Salem's finest homes, still occupied by descendants of the original owners for whom they were built. The accumulated possession of multiple generations filled rooms and attics, and Curwen was not shy about letting owners know what was of interest to him. His cousin Sally Ropes Orne, a reclusive widow, repaid his years of kindness toward her by leaving him the most unusual article of furniture in her possession, a late 18th-century mahogany fire screen with a drop-leaf shelf for a candle, which had descended in the Higginson family. (7) On another occasion, Curwen related how cousin James Ward, while on his death bed, had "requested his wife to send me some of the old things belonging to the family of which he had an abundance, so a few days after the funeral...she sent me two miniatures on ivory set in gold of my great-grandmother Ropes brother Saml. Sparhawk and his wife..a most beautiful little silver snuff box (embossed) marked A.R. Abigail Ropes..a silver Patch Box which belonged to Rev.d Geo. Curwen's wife... The handsomest Funeral Ring I have seen..a breast pin set with jet marked E. D. Ropes and some buckles." He concluded his listing with the now familiar phrase "quite a haul." (8)



Figure 4. Eighteenth century English and Continental wine glasses. Curwen Collection.

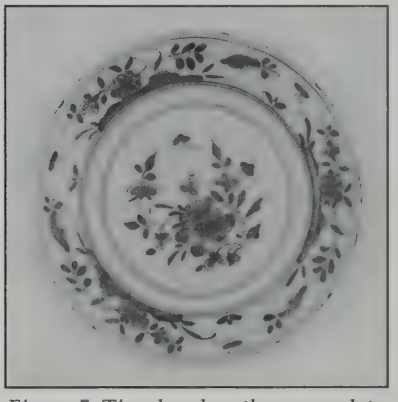


Figure 5. Tin-glazed earthenware plate with hand-painted decoration, Lambeth, England, ca.1730. Curwen Collection.

Many older items languishing in attics and basements found



Figure 6. Desk and bookcase made in Salem 1760-1780 owned by Judge Samuel Curwen. Curwen Collection.

their way into his possession. Curwen recalled how the death of his neighbor Judge Lord, prompted the Judge's daughter to inform Curwen that "there was a pair of wine coolers in their garret which I might have if I would like them, that they were very old and had been in her mother's family a long time. of course I said I should want them. I went in one evening soon after, when they were brought down for my inspection I took them home with me, Abby let me out the side door and laughingly said she supposed I was afraid of loosing them if I left them for her to send in, I thought a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." (9) Like most collectors he took his prizes home and immediately looked up the "SPODE" marking on the bottom to ascertain their date and to compare details. The design of the handles were judged to be "very good" although one was damaged. Curwen immediately took it to a restorer and anticipated its successful restoration. His collector friend Dr. Emmerton called to see the wine coolers and pronounced them "unique" and "very interesting." Curwen was elated.

Curwen was observant and diligent in his collecting pursuits, and established friendships with other Salemites of similar mind with whom he shared information and exchanged items. Like so many collectors, antiques became a passion, a pleasurable vice he delighted in being unable to curb. "What will you sell your Canton china for" he wrote to Waters in 1894, "I ought not to think of buying it but you can sympathize with me...as you are afflicted with the same weakness that I am.." (10) Curwen was especially fond of silver. In discussing what he might buy if he were in England, Curwen wrote "The silver would tempt me more than anything you know I have always had a weakness that way I am possessed now of over 700 ounces." Noting the large quantity owned by one of his early ancestors, he concluded, "it must be a family failing." (11) In keeping with tradition, Curwen left his silver to members of his family rather than including it in his bequest to the museum.

He also acquired material by special arrangement. In 1879 Curwen befriended a member of the Ingersoll family, an elderly gentleman who had fallen on hard times. He was taken in by a Mr. & Mrs. Gilligan who provided new quarters where "all his old things" made a tasteful apartment. Curwen gave Ingersoll money on occasion for transportation or medicine, telling Waters "I never let him have money without an equivalent," something in the old man's possession that Curwen coveted. "I have not got the caudle cup yet," he continued" but shall soon go in for it." Curwen assumed the Gilligans expected to inherit Ingersoll's property in exchange for their kindness, but Curwen had designs on anything of value. "If he lives much longer and my money holds out," he said, "I shall have all that is worth having." (12)



Figure 7. Col. Isaac Royal. Bas-relief medallion by James Tassie, London, 1781. Curwen Collection.

Curwen also frequented local shops where antiques were apt to surface. The first antique shop to



Figure 8. Bedstead with copper-plate printed chintz hangings, c.1800-10. Curwen Collection.

be listed in the *Salem Directory* appeared in 1878, with only sporadic listings of similar establishments thereafter. Furniture dealers and jewelers, such as William Lee on Essex Street, occasionally handled "used" items. "A short time ago," Curwen wrote in 1893, "I went into Wm. Lee's shop. he showed me a silver tea set he had bought for old silver. I asked him what he would sell it for, he said $45. I told him I would give him 40 he said split the difference and call it $42.50. I took him up and carried it home....I told him I supposed he made something handsome on it he said pretty well." Wondering if he had paid too much Curwen concluded, "What could he have given for it!" (13)

Curwen's many collecting activities resulted in a remarkable collection of quality and depth. In all, Curwen gave the museum over 350 objects, all but a few dating before 1815, and many associated with members of Curwen's own family. Seventeenth-century objects include the second oldest surviving American sampler, made by Mary Hollingsworth of Salem about 1660 (fig.3). Several items were owned by the family's founding patriarch Capt. George Corwin, including his portrait (visible in fig.2), attributed to the early limner Thomas Smith. It is the earliest of 34 portraits that Curwen donated to the Museum, representing ten generations of his family.

The bulk of the collection dates from the 18th century and includes a rich variety of household goods reflecting the refinement of colonial life in coastal Massachusetts. A well-preserved quillwork sconce (see cover illustration), made by Sarah Pickman Curwen about 1738, was acquired by Curwen in 1851. Fashioned from tiny rolls of colored paper with shells, mica and beads, the design features a stylized urn of flowers, a favored motif among the well-to-do young ladies in the Boston area who made similar creations. (14) It originally had a candle holder to provide illumination for the finely wrought details.

Curwen had a particular interest in early tableware; he donated nearly 200 examples, including a large collection of English and Continental stemware, which forms an encyclopedic sampling of the forms used within the Salem community (fig.4). He also collected tin glazed earthenware (fig.5) and chinese export porcelain, filling a china closet in his parlor which he had specially built for the purpose about 1880 (visible in fig.2). A number of the articles belonged to his most famous ancestor Judge Samuel Curwen, including the imposing desk and book case (fig.6) made in the Salem area 1760-70 with characteristic shallow blocking on the lower desk drawers and very architectural details on the upper case. The judge also owned the splendid mahogany marble-top table with finely-carved ball-and-claw feet, representing the best of the region's carving traditions. (visible in fig.2)

Among those who took political refuge with Judge Curwen in 1776 in London was Col. Isaac Royal of Medford, whose likeness was captured in a bas-relief portrait fashioned in glass-paste by the famous London artist James Tassie in 1781 (fig.7). Curwen had long coveted the image in its ornate gilt frame and rejoiced when it, and a companion likeness of Sir William Pepperrell, another of Curwen's relatives, came his way in 1889. (15)



Figure 9. Mixing Table, mahogany and marble, Salem c.1790-1800. Curwen Collection.

Collecting as early as Curwen did allowed him to acquire items that were still in a remarkable state of preservation. He owned what remains one of the most complete sets of Federal-era bedhangings to survive anywhere. The 42 pieces in the set, made from a brightly colored ca. 1800-10 English chintz, were used to drape a simple four-poster bed with a painted cornice. (fig.8) Curwen also acquired a set of elegant painted side chairs that were owned by his grandfather Captain James Barr, and, "purchased in 1812." They retain their original paint, decoration, and rush seats.



Figure 10. Lolling Chair, Salem c. 1790-1800. Curwen Collection.

Curwen clearly possessed a keen eye for the rare and the unusual, acquiring pieces that ultimately added great distinction to his collection. The marble-top mixing table he acquired that was made in Salem about 1800 is a sophisticated interpretation of the neoclassical ideal with clean lines and refined inlay. (fig.9) Few others of this form are known from the area. An unusual lolling chair in the collection (fig.10) is distinguished by a wide back crest with carved decorative details. 0f the 67 pieces of furniture in the collection, all are fine examples of their particular form.

By 1889 Curwen had already made a decision to give his collection to the museum. In a letter discussing the acquisition of two portraits he wrote "I have given them to the Essex Institute when I am done with them, as I have my pictures, what a blessing it is we have such a place to put them." (16) At the celebration in 1898 marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Essex Institute, Curwen was honored as a founding member and received a great round of applause when it was announced that his collection would be coming to the museum. (17) Its arrival following Curwen's death two years later, forced the Institute to consider expanding its facilities, which led to the acquisition of Plummer Hall in 1906. Curwen's collection formed the nucleus of the pioneering period room displays set-up by George Francis Dow a year later. (18) Dow set the organization on a new course in its collecting activities, and Curwen's collection provided a firm foundation which has grown into one of the country's finest regional decorative arts collections.

END NOTES:

1. See Richard H. Saunders, "Collecting American decorative arts in New England, Part I: 1793-1876," *Antiques*, 109, no.5 (May, 1976): 996-103; "Part II: 1876-1910," *Antiques* 110, no.4 (October, 1976): 754-763.

2. Essex Institute accession books indicate Curwen donated dozens of glass and ceramic articles to the museum between 1848 and his death in 1900.

3. A brief biography of Curwen appears in *Portraits in the Essex Institute* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1936): 36.

4. See *Catalogue of Antique Articles on Exhibition at Plummer Hall, Salem, December 1875* (Salem: Ladies Centennial Committee, 1875) and *Catalogue of Paintings, Bronzes & C. Exhibited by the Essex Institute at Plummer Hall November 1875.* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1875).

5. George Rea Curwen to Henry Fitzgilbert Waters, 20 October 1892. H.F.Waters Papers, Box 1, folder 9, James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. All subsequent quoted letters are from this source.

6. See *Salem at the World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893 Report of the Essex Institute Committee* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1893).

7. Will of Sally Ropes Orne, 1876. Ropes Family papers, James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

8. Curwen to Waters, 26 November 1883.

9. Curwen to Waters, 17 May 1884.

10. Curwen to Waters, 5 June 1894.

11. Curwen to Waters, 8 May 1894.

12. Curwen to Waters, 14 June 1894.

13. Curwen to Waters, 13 November 1893. William S. Lee was a dealer in diamonds, watches, and jewelry at 241 Essex Street, Salem.

14. See Edith Gaines," Quillwork: American paper filigree," *Antiques* 77, no.6 (December 1960): 562-5.

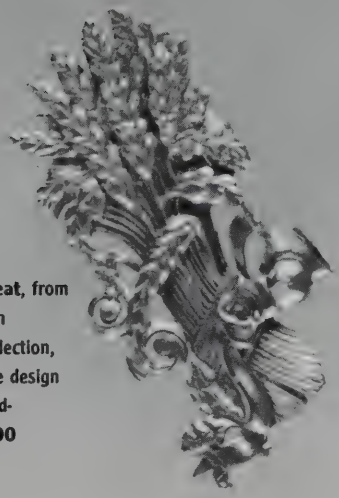
15. Curwen to Waters, 9 September 1889.

16. Curwen to Waters, 9 September 1889.

17. *Bulletin of the Essex Institute* 30 (Jan-June, 1898): 24. Curwen's will appears in the *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 36, no.1 (1900): 248-261.

18. See Anne Farnam, "George Francis Dow: A Career of Bringing the "picturesque tradition of sleeping generations" to Life in the Early Twentieth Century," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 121, no.2 (April, 1985): 78. Curwen's collection is also discussed by Farnam in the introduction to *Furniture at the Essex Institute* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1980): 4-7.

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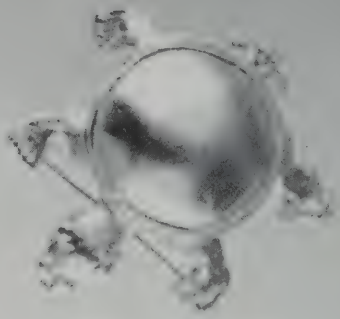


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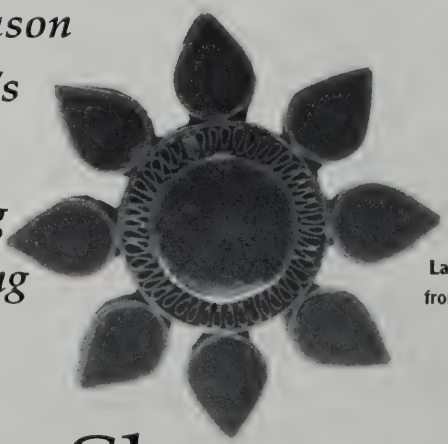
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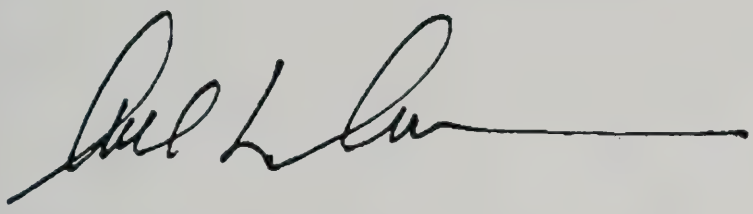


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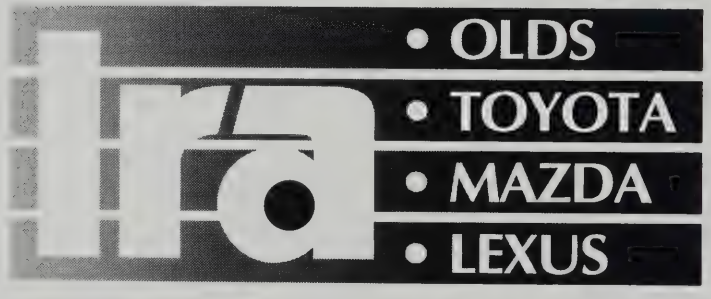
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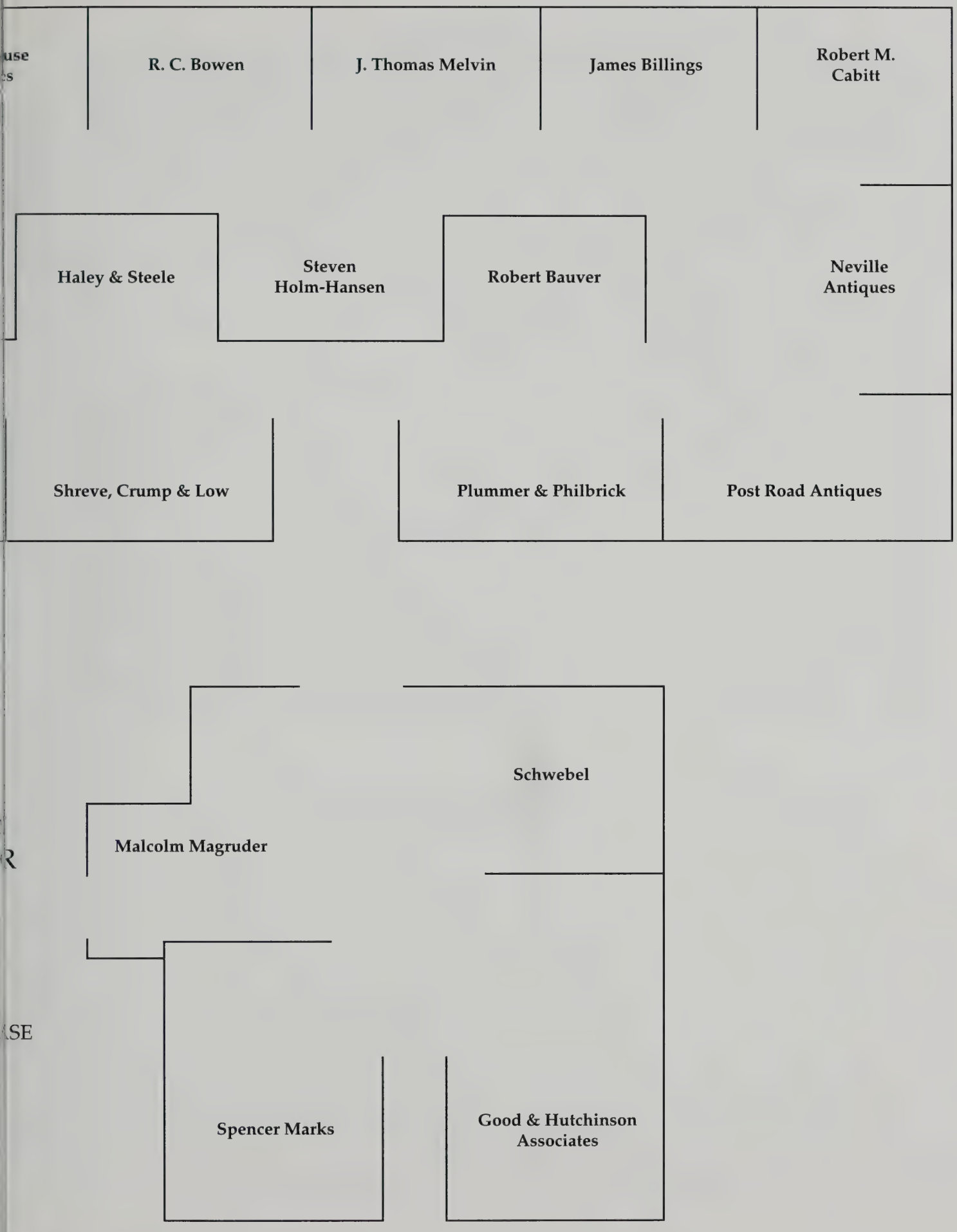
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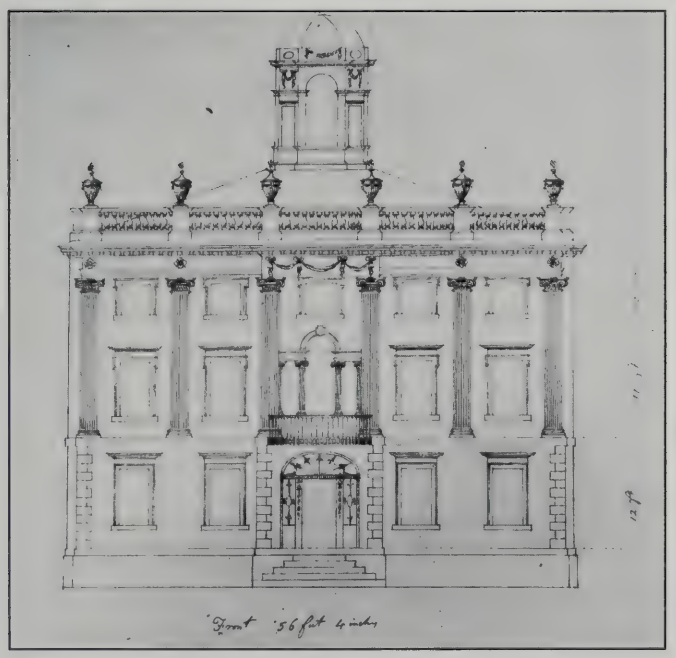
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NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM:
A New Order of the Ages

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Crafting a nation was heady business, and the framers of the Constitution approached it as men of destiny. Likening themselves to the fabled "lawgivers" of ancient times, the leading delegates at Philadelphia shared James Madison's solemn conviction that they would "decide forever the fate of republican government." They brought a vast knowledge of history and the whole long tradition of civic humanism with them to the Convention in May of 1787; they departed four months later having fashioned a frame of government—"the work of many heads and many hands," Madison wrote long afterward—that not only necessitated a redefinition of the terms in which the theory and ideology of civic humanism had been discussed but also introduced a new concept to the discourse—that of federalism—and in the doing, created *novus ordo seclorum;* they devised a new order out of the materials prescribed by the ages. They dared to believe that the United States could show the world what good government was; they were obsessed with the mission of America as asylum, America as redeemer, America as exporter of the spirit of liberty, of America as the "seat of another golden age." They dreamed of achieving



Study for the Derby Mansion, Salem, by Samuel McIntire, c. 1795. James Duncan Phillips Library. Peabody Essex Museum.

that rarefied state of stability and order through a national government—a government elected by, representative of, and responsible to the people: in short, a republic based on the model of the Greek city-states and especially Imperial Rome. The architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe predicted that through the ideals represented by the arts of the ancient world, "the days of Greece may be revived in the woods of America" by architects and craftsmen. Samuel McIntire, "the architect of Salem" and skilled wood-carver, worked on the rows of imposing yet restrained Federal-style houses of Salem in the classical vocabulary; the Federal facades of his buildings are supremely self-confident renditions of Grecian styles that echoed the confidence and optimism of Americans. When McIntire died in 1811, Bentley the diarist could truly say, "all the improvements of Salem for nearly thirty years past have been done under his eye." It was no small achievement to have transformed a whole city into an Athens of the western world.

Antiquity haunted and obsessed the federal imagination and Americans liberally plundered the classics for their own lives and the national good. The Revolution itself had been partly guided by classical ideals; its symbols and its institutions were markedly Greco-Roman in inspiration. The senior legislative body in the United States was called the Senate—the name of the elders' council of the Roman republic—which meets in the Capital, a building named after one of the seven hills of Rome and built on a famous Greco-Roman model. The revolutionary generation of the Founding Fathers in their moral earnestness, their urgent seriousness, and their high-minded idealism ransacked ancient history to bring about a new and better world—"to form a more perfect union"—governed by the immutable laws of reason and equity, a dream of classic perfection, or at least the closest approximation to it feasible on earth. "The Roman Republic," Alexander Hamilton wrote in The Federalist, No. 34, "attained to the utmost height of human greatness." The Founding Fathers—classicists who read Polybius, Plutarch, Cicero, Sallust, and Tacitus—embarked on a perilous adventure of establishing a republic, and for landmarks they peered

across the gulf of centuries to Greece and Rome, which they saw as the noblest achievement of free men aspiring to govern themselves. These leaders liked to "look back with reverence" to classical antiquity as they sculpted their heroes in togas, named new communities Athens and Sparta, Ithaca and Troy, organized the Society of Cincinnati, assigned shelves of Latin texts to the young, and built Greek temples for their banks and churches and schools.

Neoclassicism—or the Federal style—in America represents the culminating phase in that great outburst of human inquiry in the late eighteenth century known as the Enlightenment. The neoclassical style matured rapidly and its moment of flowering after the age of democratic revolutions was relatively brief; in its



The eagle and other carved details on this c. 1800 mahogany side chair are attributed to Salem's Samuel McIntire. Gift of George Rea Curwen, Peabody Essex Museum.

primitive simplicity and purity it was called by artists and theorists simply the "true" or "correct" style, a reassertion of timeless truths and in no sense a mere fashion. The fashion-conscious mania for frivolity and deception, irrationality and novelty were among those aspects of the Rococo style which were most abhorred and rejected by protagonists of the "pure fountains" of classical antiquity. The only way to become great, wrote Winckelmann, "is to imitate antiquity"; he advised painters to "dip their brush in intellect." His advice implied a new and more elevated estimate of the artists and the craftsman and their role in society. All of the arts—the fine arts and the decorative arts—were to be didactic; through a completely new, austerely simplified vocabulary or ornament, the arts were meant to uplift, to educate, to ennoble. In the sparkling, new morning of Neoclassicism following the languorous afternoon of Rococo, we now find themes and subjects of a very different kind; sobering lessons in the more homely virtues, stoic exemplars of unspoilt and uncorrupted simplicity, of abstinence and continence, of clarity and gravity, of noble self-sacrifice and heroic patriotism. By imitation of antiquity this generation did not mean copying; imitation implied a rigorous process of extraction and distillation. Horatio Greenough, the "Yankee stonecutter," insisted, "I contend for Greek principles, not Greek things." And it was "to attain the real simplicity of Nature" that Sir Joshua Reynolds recommended the study of antiquity. In the outpouring of writings surrounding the ratification of the Constitution, no one had a more dramatic and articulate sense of the achievement than James Madison, who neatly summed up the prevailing compromise between ancient thought, reason, and present needs, the operative mix of empiricism and rationalism: "Is it not the glory of Americans that, whilst they have paid a decent regard to the opinions of former times and other nations, they have not suffered a blind veneration of antiquity to overrule the suggestions of - their good sense...and the lessons of their own experience?" This distinction is of fundamental importance for an understanding of the Federal attitude to the antique.

The stylistic change which took place in the late eighteenth century can be attributed to a new appreciation and better understanding of antiquity as a result of the greatest archaeological event of the century—the excavation of Herculaneum and Pompeii. Engraved volumes popularized the neoclassical vision of pure, noble, and uncorrupted antique world and sought to create an art of universal significance. A number of French and English pattern books of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries served as the source of inspiration for craftsmen, offering variations and permutations of every conceivable classical motif and composition, both for cabinetmakers in England as well as for those in seaport towns such as Salem who were attempting to provide their customers with what was most fashionable and up-to-date. Yet the products

that resulted from the cabinetmaking shops in Salem and Boston, New York and Philadelphia, were finally much more indigenously American and regional than they were slavish imitations of an illustration or illustrations from a single design book as craftsmen responded to demands for greater simplicity, sobriety, and solidity inspired by objects excavated in Greece and Rome and now realized in polished wood and sparkling ormolu. The lofty ideals of Neoclassicism affected and influenced the everyday world of the decorative arts with a new aesthetic—a cool precision of line, delicacy of detail, attractive contrasts of textures, and an opulent simplicity and easy elegance.

In its intent, its classical design, and its unfinished chaos, Washington—the Federal City—symbolized the new nation. On paper, the design was a perfect construct of Enlightenment rationality and good sense; in reality, the Republic existed as a almost ungovernable collection of diverse elements caught up in an atmosphere of rapid and unpredictable change. Many observers feared that a national government based on republican principles would prove impossible when stretched to the unheard-of scale of the American continent. "You might as well attempt to rule Hell by Prayer," wrote a typical anti-Federalist in 1787. Those anxieties were based upon hard realities. Sectional difference among Americans in the new nation remained as apparent as the common qualities that had united them earlier against England. Differences of ethnic origin, culture, occupation, and class fragmented the Republic into regional groupings of pluralistic and diversified states. These centrifugal forces, given the added innovations constantly being introduced by science and technology, appeared to defy all attempts at harnessing them. This threatening sense of self-destruction, this pervasive self-doubt, this intense conviction of the improbability of their undertaking were all nourished by the unfortunate speculations of some of the French philosophers about the lessened potency of nature in the New World. While Americans in the new republic longed for stability and predictability, they lived in a world of chaotic change that was at odds with their ideal. The result was a society of contrasts and a people of paradox—crude and civilized, violent and peaceful, exuberant and restrained.

The forces of change were many. European visitors during the first half of the nineteenth century were astounded not only by the size of the new Republic, but were also struck by its emptiness. Between 1800 and 1850 the population of slightly more than five million persons quintupled by immigration and natural fertility. And this dramatic growth in population increased mobility as the center of population steadily moved West. "In most places there is no a single grown man or woman native to the place, or indeed, to the territory," commented one traveler in 1847; "Many of them have moved a number of times, always farther west, and they will very likely do so again." The driving



Maple armchair in the Grecian style. Made in Boston in 1826 for the Lee family of Salem. Gift of Mrs. F H. Lee. Peabody Essex Museum.

force behind this restiveness was cheap or free land. We were a nation of farmers and over four-fifths of the population in 1800 earned their living from the soil. And the land was so rich and plentiful that surpluses were generally available for the market. In every region, the growth of commercial agriculture created a phenomenon unknown in the Old World: land became—as well as the cottage industries of the hearth and home—a commodity to be bought and sold. Commerce encouraged urbanization and manufacturing, and cities along the seaboard grew with the market. The small farmers of the hinterland served the needs of maritime entrepreneurs, and the profits earned financed new ventures, built factories and homes, paid wages, and filtered down to support churches, hospitals, schools, and colleges. Territorial expansion opened up

a continent of almost limitless assets promising the industrious artisans and craftsmen success and achievement. The egalitarian ideology of the Revolution encouraged mobility and raised expectations. The Industrial Revolution introduced the tools of technology to economic enterprise. And running through all these forces of change was the American capacity for innovation. It was not so much the innovation in the sense of discovery, so much as innovation in the sense that Americans could adapt their resources to solve problems, "Our greatest thinkers," one practical man boasted, "are not in the library, nor the capitol, but in the machine shop." Utility and austerity were at the confluence of classical republican theories, which also helps to explain the intellectual reaction against the Rococo style.

Where artists and craftsmen in the Federal period had sought inspiration in the bold simplicity and most primitive forms of the Greeks, those of the Empire period turned to the decorative richness and florid opulence of Imperial Rome. The pure severity of the Doric order was replaced by Corinthian richness and splendor; under the Empire the idea of art as education was transformed into that of art as propaganda. In both England and American this change in style to copy antique prototypes—Grecian chairs and Roman silver—by cabinetmakers and silversmiths in meticulously accurate imitations carried revivalist tendencies to their logical conclusion. And with it the Victorian age of historical revivalism was launched. Paradoxically, the neoclassical doctrine of the Ideal contained within itself the seeds of most of the Romantic forces that were to destroy it.

The Federal style in America deserves to be judged by its own high standards, by its beliefs rather than the internal conflicts they imply, by its aims and achievements rather than its outcome, by its masterpieces than later derivations from them. It was an Enlightenment movement based on faith in the perfectibility of man, the essential goodness and reasonableness of humanity. It aimed to produce an art of eternal and universal relevance; under its impact, perhaps for the first time in history, nearly all of the artists and craftsmen of the Old World as well as the New seem to have been striving towards a common end, however different their starting points and however conflicting their views on how they could reach their goal. The United States during this era was, by the Constitutions, both a nation and a collections of states and sections. Its furniture, like its society and culture, displayed regional difference and local diversities that were fundamental—a tangled skein of regional characteristics in form, materials, construction, and decoration, which in their complexities and ambiguities somehow are bound up and are unified into a style we call uniquely American. Americans in the new nation were conscious not only of being new, but of being different. They gradually began to realize that it was of distinct advantage to the United States, as Jefferson said, to have "the American hemisphere to itself." It might well be, they concluded, that the United States, because it was new and different, was possibly superior to the old nations, and that God had willed it so. "We are destined to be a barrier against the return of ignorance and barbarism," Jefferson wrote to his old friend John Adams; "Old Europe will have to lean on our shoulders, and to hobble along by our side...as she can." A seafaring culture took root along the length of the New England coast, and out of it came a "codfish aristocracy" that possessed an acute business sense and who became the patrons of the colonial craftsmen. As the British consul noted in 1789, "The inhabitants of New England may be said to be a peculiar people: they have more public spirit, more enterprize, energy and activity of mind and body than their neighbors." They brought to their livelihood of sea trade an attitude that went beyond mere getting and spending. One observer characterized them as "distinguished by a lively imagination....Their enterprises are sudden, bold, and sometimes rash. A general spirit of adventure prevails here."

The rich diversity of American antiques in the Federal period, of which furniture is but one expression, can only be understood in the context of the nation's pluralistic and paradoxical society living under our magisterial Constitution—a society of multiple allegiances, mixed interests, which held the individual citizen in sort of loose social orbit. Unlike any other western nation, we were a people of contrasts: a nation born of revolt that was moderate, yet genuinely revolutionary; a society that was liberal in its ideals, yet conservative in its behavior; united in its divisions, and divided in its unity. *E pluribus unum* was not an idly chosen motto for the society and the culture of the new republic.

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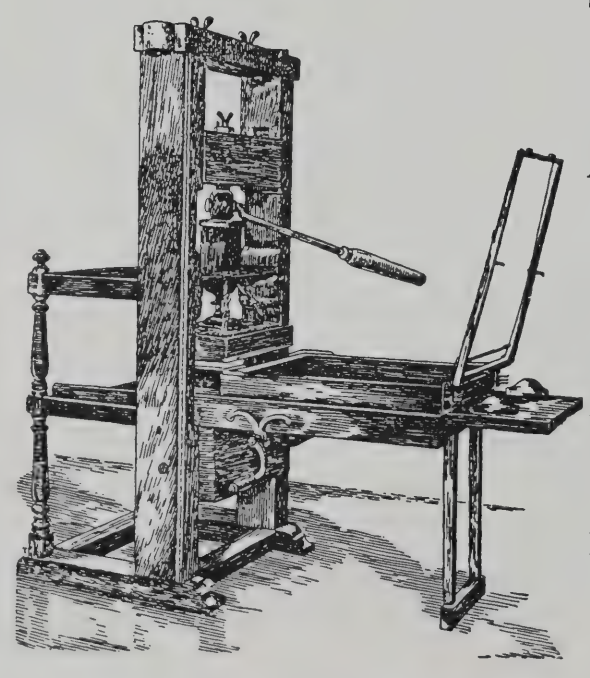
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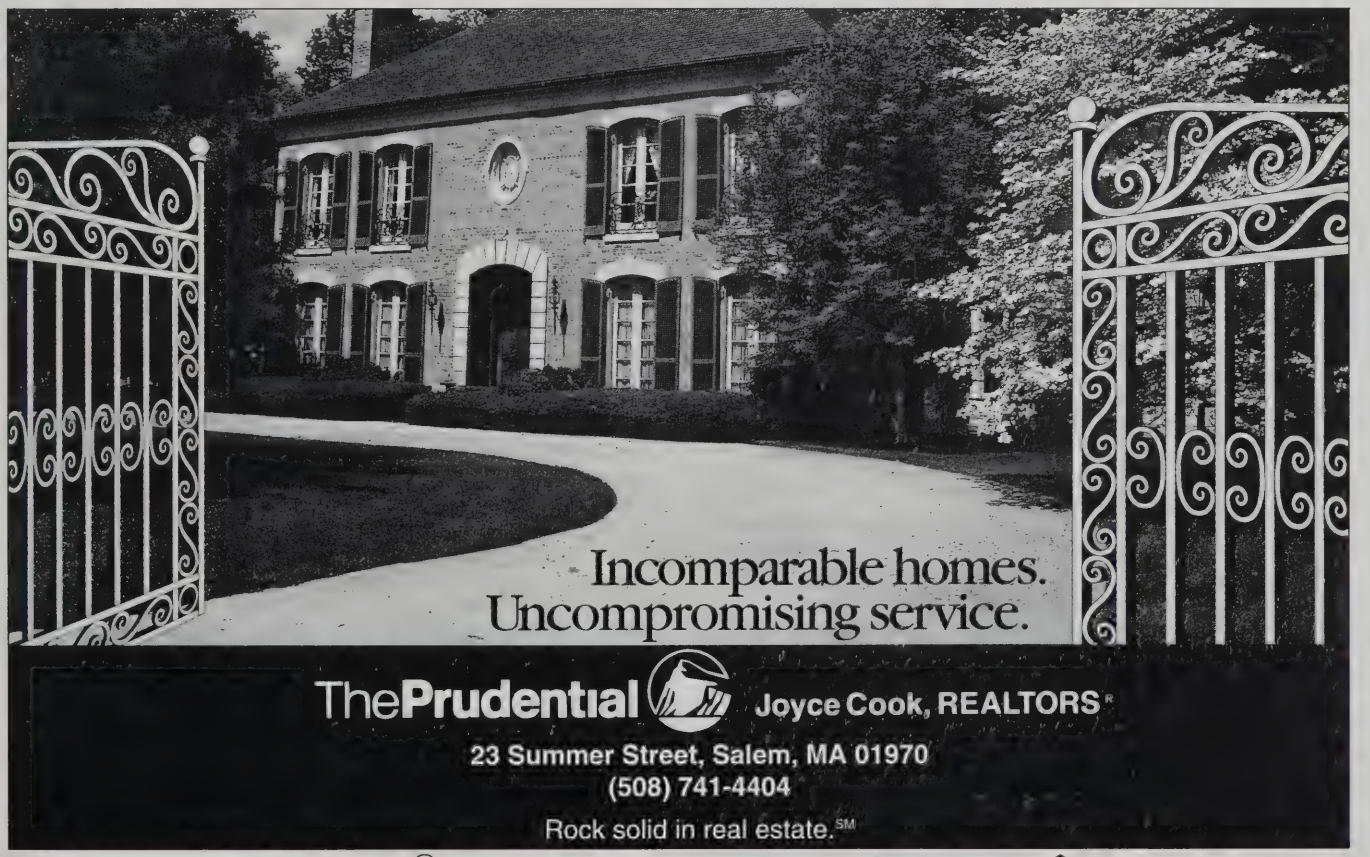
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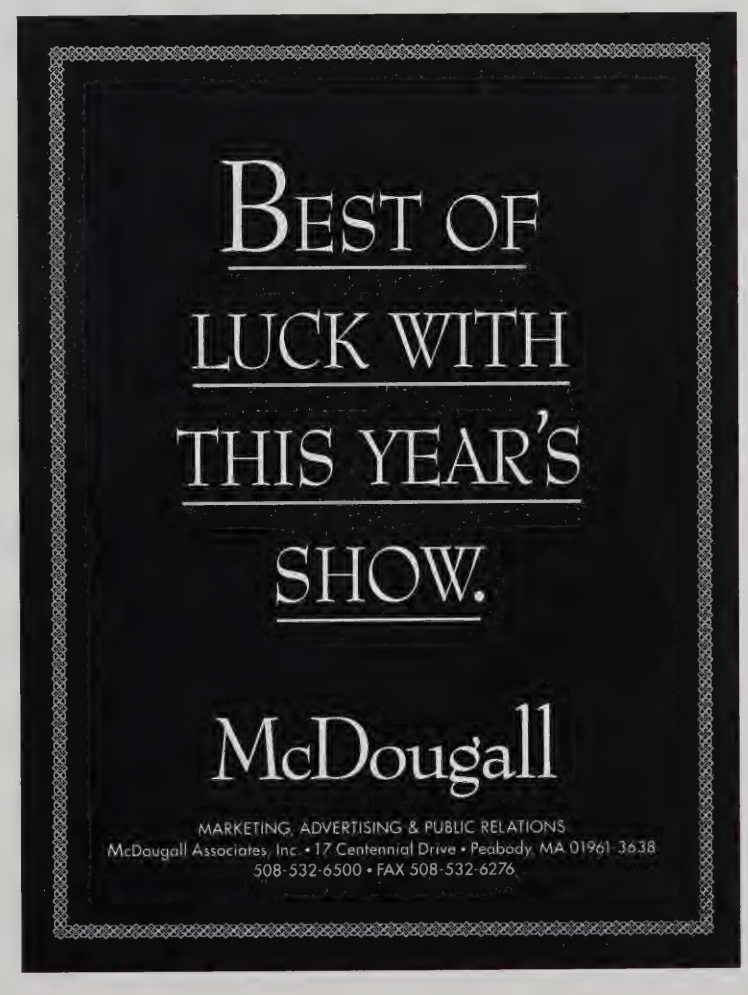
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman wishes to acknowledge with deep gratitude all the following for their generosity and help in producing the 21st Annual Antiques Show for the Peabody Essex Museum:

- Our corporate and individual Benefactors and Sponsors for their very generous contributions.
- Dan Monroe who pitched right in to become an integral part of the Antiques Show tradition as our new leader.
- Ann Jackson, whose title for the Show "Museum Liaison" is grossly inadequate to describe her dedicated efforts.
- Dan Finamore for his invaluable planning and logistical help and advice.
- Christine Vining, so much more than Show Manager, who gets better every year.
- The Lahikainens, Dean for his pen and Elizabeth for the spoken word.
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- Dan Slade, Bette Leistinger, Robin Cennerazzo and the entire staff of the Cricket Press: It's so nice to be home again.
- All the organizations who donated items for the Preview Party:

Elizabeth Horan Catering	Lily Wong's, Middleton	Salem Liquors
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- June Zieff for her expert oversight of the Bartlett Kitchen at the Preview Party.
- Virginia and Frank Landolphi who were so instrumental in getting donated items.
- Marion Robinson and Merrilyn Belliveau for their green thumbs.
- John Sanidas, the "bar czar" and his assuredly better half, Carol.
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- Extra special thanks from the Chairman to Missy Kasnet, who really did all of the work, and to Bonnie Belair for a superlative job organizing the Preview Party.

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